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ABSTRACT

The history of American prison education from 1650 to the present can be divided into five periods. Generally speaking, the education provided in prisons has been loose, fragmented, and essentially reflective of the prevailing local prison administration. Although the trend has been toward the adoption of a more enlightened view toward inmates and toward the provision of more and better educational opportunities for them, the recent overcrowding and budget cuts facing America's prisons have threatened the progress that has been made in the area of prison education. One solution would be the development of community-based volunteer programs that would allow inmates to assist in the literacy education of their fellow inmates. A prototypical model of such a program is urgently needed. In addition, practitioners concerned with the issue of literacy education in America's prisons must take the following steps to establish a national network to exchange information and link their current efforts and practices: make contact with state and federal departments of corrections and related corrections organizations, identify key personnel within these departments who would be willing to share and exchange information, and propose a newsletter or publication to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas. (MN)

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VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS BEHIND WALLS: A SENSIBLE APPROACH TO THE ADULT ILLITERACY PROBLEM (AN EVOLUTIONARY/HISTORICAL REVIEW)

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INTRODUCTION

To appreciate the present wave of positive attention centered on corrections education, it is paramount to establish an historical perspective against which the whole of corrections education may be viewed. In this regard, a better understanding of the inmate community-based organizational phenomenon can be effected. This recent trend toward prisoner involvement in the prison community itself, largely an outgrowth of today's prison overcrowdedness, has large-scale positive implications for all of corrections.

In general, prison education has been historically loose and fragmented and essentially married to the prevailing local prison administration. For the most part, early administrations, however varied, had their roots in theory X organizational principles where mistrust and few freedoms were provided to the inmate population (see p.5). Instead of a community behind walls, early prisons were mostly an aggregate of individuals, each prisoner fending for himself: "An atomized society" as Clemmer (1940) called it. Historically, the inmate community has been entirely dependent on the whims of its civilian administrators, and it is not encouraged to develop a sense of caring about its own community (Glasser, 1964). This phenomenon continues today, but is changing in many locations.

Generally, prison officials in the role of "in loco parentis" mandate needs and services as they see fit. Sometimes this practice is further complicated administratively when another agency - frequently a state or regional education agency- adds its own policy provisions to the already imposing prison administrative structure.

It is the intent of this paper to first provide an historical backdrop detailing prison education's historical developments. Attention will focus on the prevailing trends which dominate managerial thinking and largely determine the direction, success and/or failure of education programs.

Consideration will be given to the problems associated with rehabilitation, corrections' elusive albatross. Finally, a look at the importance of inmate community-based organizational approaches to traditional prison problems, illiteracy in particular, will be provided.

Historical Points of Departure

1) 1650 - 1800

There are five main periods through which American prison education has journeyed. The first, from around 1650 to 1800, centered around the religiously-based thinking of the Quakers of Philadelphia. Confinement and corrective punishment gradually became management alternatives to the then common capital punishment. Eventually four separate penal systems emerged throughout this period (Angle, 1982):

> "one for solitary confinement, one for labor, houses of correction for those charged with misdemeanors, and a system of reform schools to take children out of jails..." (p. 4).

Discipline and punishment were the rule during this period. However, near the turn of the century, things began to become more progressive.

(2) 1790 - 1830

This was the famous Philadelphia model period, stemming from the formation of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (now called the Pennsylvania Prison Society) in 1776. According to Foucault (1977), this period introduced a number of innovations that were to be continuously re-examined and transformed right up to the great debates of the 1830's.

Largely begun with the opening up of the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia (in 1790) and directly influenced by the Quakers, these jails and their earlier prototypes were probably among the first to provide instruction to prisoners; this instruction was largely religious. Prisoners were kept constantly occupied on productive endeavors; their lives were strictly partitioned (Foucault).

First, Bible instruction was instituted in typical Sabbath schools, then later on some secular instruction emerged in the form of the three R's. In 1829, Kentucky passed legislation requiring prison wardens to set aside four hours of instructional time every Sunday; expenses were not to exceed $250.00 per year for this mandated reading, writing, and arithmetic instruction (Wines, 1867).

(3) 1830 - 1870

During this period and accentuated by the progressive debates of the '30's, prison education and general instruction of incarcerates became a more standard practice. In 1847, New York appointed teachers for each of its state prisons; prison libraries there,too,emerged on the scene. Still, by the 1850's, classroom instruction was the exception. Sabbath schools predominated with the majority of instruction being given by Chaplains at the door of each man's cell.

By 1870, however, one of the era's best instances of prison instruction occurred in the Detroit House of Detention. By 1871, two thirds of the prison inmate population there were attending school. Despite this atypicality, about twenty thousand of the then thirty-eight thousand or so prisoners in the United States were considered illiterate. In general, most prison administrators opposed any organized convict education, sharing the belief that prison education would only result in a more clever criminal, an attitude that still lingers today (Roberts, 1971). On the one hand, while seeming to favor the apparent discipline associated with schools and libraries, prison education as a tool for reform continued to remain suspect by most prison wardens.

(4) 1870 - 1929

With the formation of the American Prison Association in the 1870's, prison education moved away from an isolated activity to a more organized entity; this was the era of pragmatism and progressivism.

Vocational trade schools emerged on the scene in 1876 at Elmira, New York. Its well-known trend-setting superintendent, Zebulon Brockway, touted education as having a very important place in the correctional process; before long, Elmira acquired an international reputation and became a much replicated model program (McKelvey, 1936)..

In the 1880's, prisons gradually began operating semblances of high school programs, though largely through correspondence, a popular instructional medium at this time (Grattan, 1959). The idea that education is an integral part of corrections seemed to take hold, wane in the early 1900's, and then re-emerge in the 20's as an established pattern - though far from being comprehensive and adequate.

(5) 1929 - Present

The period beginning in 1929 was highlighted by two important developments. First, prison education was recognized as being an essential ingredient in any modern program of correctional treatment, and secondly, it began to be believed that prison education should be qualitatively similar to free society adult education programs.

Ruth Cavan (1955) reports that changes in prisoner education occurred as a result of:

(1) the dissolution of prison industries;
(2) the establishment of the Federal Prison System with well-developed school facilities which set the standards for state institutions; and
(3) the attention focused on the criminal and his community by psychologists and sociologists with a corresponding general shift to concerns about the criminal's re-entry into society (pps. 10 - 11).

In the 1940's and 50's, the federal system continued to expand, establishing standards and trends. Coupled with the rising popularity of "criminology" and the emphasis on resocialization of the offender, prisoner education continued to venture into social education, college programming, and even Great Books courses.

The 1960's was seen as the era of innovation with an emphasis on programmed instruction and reinforcement theory and the development of individually prescribed instruction, particularly at Draper Correctional Institution in Alabama (McKee, 1972).

In the 1970's, Many state prison systems linked up with LEA's (legal educational agencies) or SEA's (state educational agencies) tailoring their programs to the public school model, adapting their program services to conform to state and federal mandated specifications.

THE '80's : An Update

The rapid growth of prison population in the 1980's with accompanying serious overcrowding has necessitated both new legislation and a re-focus on prison's role in the rehabilitation process. In Pennsylvania, alone, more than 3,000 new prison cells are under construction; $230 million is earmarked for prison expansion (Kelchner, 1985). At the State Correctional Institution in Huntingdon (SCIH), daytime

school enrollment rose from 235 (fall, 1980) to a current enrollment of almost 700 (winter, 1985) with an additional 100+ on a waiting list.

In addition, inmates are doubled-up in single cells, building maintenance costs are soaring, the parole board is leaning toward mandatory educational program involvement for all, while new treatment staff positions (including prison education positions) remain frozen indefinitely while disregarding escalating needs. The legal system is advocating longer sentences while space accomodations restrict inmate movement and program development as well. Fiscal restraints foretell of cutbacks, and the relief valve on the pressure cooker appears stuck for sometime to come.

Theory X and Theory Y

Theory X

People are inherently evil.
Instincts drive people.
Coercion motivates the individual.
Competition is a natural state.
The individual is most important.
Pessimism is pervasive.
Work is inherently distasteful.

Theory Y

People are inherently good.
Humanism drives people.
Cooperation motivates the individual.
The group is most important.
Optimism is pervasive.
Work is intrinsically rewarding.(p.173)

Along with overcrowding and general upheaval within the prison system, the prison administrator mold appears to be changing. Today's administrator is college educated and oftentimes has a background in education. Instead of a preponderance of restrictive Theory X organizational principles, where authoritarianism and pessimism rule the day, more Theory Y practices are being enacted: attention has begun to focus on employee satisfaction and creativity, especially when dealing with organizational goals. Flexible organizational structure is more often supplanting the traditional rigidity found in Theory X principles (Zivan, 1975).

Of course, employee satisfaction and creativity emerge only when there already exist adequate prison custody, security and control. Without these vital mechanisms in place, a reverse pyramid power structure exists - one in which the inmates run the prison. When this occurs, only Theory X guidelines prevail, and there is little hope for a loosening of the structure; it becomes stifling for all. The substance of theories X and Y is nicely delineated in Hoy and Miskel's text on Educational Administration (1982).

Educational services are viewed as being vitally essential both as a control measure and a time-structuring device and are more humanistic than in the past. Prison education has become a primary rehabilitative tool, though very recent research suggests that rehabilitation works best with a young age group regretful of criminal involvement (Donahue, 1985).

It has long been an accepted fact that prison education can, as Gehring (1980) states:

> "Improve opportunities for productive employment, provide a practical context for the development of prosocial reintegrative skills" (p. 6).

Former Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell also strongly advocates corrections education as a way out, and he openly endorsed the formation of a national corrections program in 1980.

A Closed/Open System

Prison has historically remained a closed system with virtually little contact and few allies outside its own system; it was largely self-sufficient and still remains very much so, especially with its own farms, industries, schools, and churches.

With overwhelming overcrowding, the system has had to deal with unbelievable inmate numbers and a concomitant variety of problems. Resources to successfully meet increasing needs have been slow to come and often reduced. Prisons are notoriously behind when attempting to meet inmate needs (Mitford, 1973). Creative prison managers, on the other hand, have begun to risk permitting inmate groups to assume unheard of initiatives by encouraging them to develop prison community-based organizations that occasionally achieve greater effectiveness than typical administratively-based ones.

For instance, the recent phenomenon of adult literacy has prompted the emergence of a number of volunteer groups

nationwide to recognize the problem in their own community and establish action groups to effect changes. These literacy councils are attempting to tackle this enormous problem, though they are barely scratching the surface.

While it has been an accepted fact that prisoners have low achievement scores, some authors have maintained that the average inmate reads at about a fourth-grade level (Kozol, 1985). At SCIH, the average inmate appears to be reading at about the 6th or 7th grade level; his I.Q. falls within the low-normal range, and less than 25 percent have a high school diploma.

Several years ago an attempt was made to recruit civilian volunteers to work with inmate non-readers at SCIH. This attempt failed, as did any further attempts.

The Community-Based Phenomenon

It is this author's contention that the SCIH inmate community would ultimately be better serviced if it had opportunities to serve itself and as such, form its own inmate councils. After all, its problems are peculiar to its own community. There are an adequate number of educated inmates interested in organizing a council and capable of tutoring as well. A variety of other resources exist internally also: a progressive school program, a supportive educational staff and a common inmate culture.

SCI Huntingdon's Literacy Council now has over 30 trained inmate tutors teaching almost 40 functional illiterates. Despite a well-defined constitution, functional bylaws, and a staff coordinator, the council remains a loose-structure organization. It espouses the culture of the inmate community rather than advocating tight leadership practices common to the prison administration. Its looseness or openness permits all council members to share in the decision making. Theory Z principles , touting structural looseness and culturally-based business organizational phenomena - like those found in Japanese industry - contrast harshly with the predominant Theory X and occasional Theory Y practices of the prison administration. However, the literacy council's tight values structure, as a Theory Z feature, easily permits it widespread acceptance within its own community. It is clearly a venture whose decisions and policies are determined within the community, by the community, for community use.

In fact, its values appear so tightly in place that it

has become largely self-sufficient. In an attempt to raise money for student and tutor workbooks and materials, the council approached other inmate organizations such as the Pennsylvania Lifers, Community First Step, and the inmate Jaycee chapter, all of whom raise money by selling fast-food items such as soda, hotdogs, popcorn, hoagies, etc. One such organization grosses nearly $35,000 annually for food concessions alone. Thus far the Huntingdon Literacy Council-SCI has received over $1500 from these inmate groups, some of whom have difficulty spending such vast sums of money - clearly a phenomenon not anticipated by the Quakers in the 1650's.

Attempting to retain its autonomy, plans are afoot by the literacy council to attempt to develop self-instructional modules which will eventually permit in-house tutor and council member instruction. Cooperative research projects with Penn State University and the council's active pursuit of grant monies and materials for continued development will help insure its self-direction.

Other Developments

The idea of volunteer inmate service organizations is not new. Effective literacy councils are in place in a number of prisons nationwide. One of the better ones is housed at the Camp Hill State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania, the first of its kind nationwide. Cooperative ventures with Book-of-the-Month Club Inc. and Time Life, Inc. make it exceptionally innovative (Kelchner, 1985). Interestingly enough, the actual number of inmate tutors appears small as the Camp Hill council depends heavily on outside volunteer intervention. In contrast, the literacy program at Staunton Correctional Center in Virginia boasts an impressive inmate tutor corps of over 65, each providing one-on-one instruction to fellow inmate students (Marlin, 1984). Staunton's council, while unlike Huntingdon's, appears to have numerous linkages with the civilian community which provide for its direction.

According to Helen Marchese, Director of Literacy Councils for New York's Department of Corrections, there are literacy councils in place in a majority of their correctional facilities. Each apparently has an appointed paid staff coordinator; she reports moderate system-wide success despite an enormous inmate population of nearly 40,000 and a concomitant high illiteracy problem. It appears that most, if not all, of the inmate councils are not autonomous organizations, but depend entirely on staff direction (1985).

Dr. Peter Cookson, Director of the Institute for the Study of Adult Illiteracy at the Pennsylvania State University reports of an unsuccessful attempt to organize inmate literacy councils within the New Mexico prison system (1985).

Although there appears to be a variety of inmate literacy councils, most, however, appear other-directed. Often the local prison administration or outside civilian groups provide the direction and the resources and for-the-most part frequently reap the satisfactions associated with such a venture. Provided the prison climate is conducive to considerable autonomy to inmate organizations, it would appear that an inmate-based, community-rooted program would have greater impact on the inmate community; it would be more effective in the long run: in the community, by the community, for the community. Although effective administrative structure is an issue here, the bottom line is not really which organizational structure is superior to another, but whether inmate illiterates are sufficiently serviced.

Huntingdon's literacy council is already dealing with almost as many non-readers as the daytime education staff. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections plans to have inmate literacy councils in operation at each of its correctional institutions. The obvious service capabilities would appear to be enormous both for the inmate community and for the local institution.

Often organization survival is strengthened when much of its work is self-directed or self-initiated. This author is involved in another inmate volunteer service organization which makes talking books for the blind. Largely, through its own initiative, this small group was able to secure a sophisticated stereo recording system, 200 blank 90 minute cassettes and a private foundation grant of $1,000 to develop a talking book library. Were it entirely dependent upon other direction and other-determined goals, it might lack much of the initiative needed to accomplish these self-initiated ones.

Conclusion

A recent October 1985 adult literacy conference in New York attempted to explore the inmate literacy movement nationwide in one of its workshops. What emerged was largely regional reporting. Scant information and spotty documentation revealed enormous gaps in national reporting

and a larger-scale need-to-know sharing effort was evident. A network providing an exchange of information linking current efforts and practices was also indicated.

It is this writer's intention to attempt to help to establish such a national network by initiating the following steps:

(1) make contact with state and federal departments of correction and related corrections organizations;

(2) identify key personnel within these state and federal departments who would be willing to share and exchange information about inmate literacy efforts;

(3) propose a newsletter or publication where a forum for the exchange of ideas can occur.

One of the priorities addressed by the National Institute of Corrections, in its current direct technical assistance program, calls for the development of a prototypical inmate literacy organization to set a national standard. Hopefully, some of its features will include a community-based emphasis, self-directed goal development, supportive encouragement, and facilitative linkages; it should also incorporate already existing generic practices that can be employed in almost any correctional setting.

A very recent announcement indicates that prospective literacy program workshops will be conducted by the American Correctional Asssociation in 1986 in three sites across the country.

In addition, the newly appointed Director of the Adult oteracy Initiative, Mr. Karl Haigler, announces in his Fall, 1985 update that the Intradepartmental Coordinating Committee on Correctional Education is actively working to properly address the prison illiteracy problem. If interested, contact:

The Adult Literacy Initiative
FOB 6, Room 4145
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202
(202) 472-9020

When the development of concerned inmate groups is permitted, the job of corrections education will be much easier. It may be naive to think that inmates and staff could or should work side by side for the good of humanity. None-the-less, this is the true stuff of rehabilitation. Hopefully others will recognize its potential and permit it to flourish.

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